

Reviews

MARTIN GOODMAN, with JEREMY COHEN and DAVID SORKIN (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002. xiv, 1037 pp. £80.00. ISBN 0-19-829996-6.

This impressive volume, though not a handbook in the ordinary sense in view of its length, is a must for scholars' bookshelves and academic libraries covering Jewish Studies. Its twofold aim is to describe the current state of the discipline as broadly defined and to enable individuals working in diverse parts of the field to place what they are doing within that wider context. To that end, the book comprises thirty-nine chapters from forty-five editors and contributors. After a useful introductory chapter by the main editor (M. Goodman, 'The Nature of Jewish Studies'), chapters 2–19 are predominantly historical in orientation (e.g. C. Hezser, 'Classical Rabbinic Literature'; S. A. Stein, 'Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries since 1492'; D. Rechter, 'Western and Central European Jewry in the Modern Period: 1750–1933'; and M. Stanislawski, 'Eastern European Jewry in the Modern Period: 1750–1939'). The remaining twenty chapters are arranged thematically (e.g. P.-I. Halevi, 'The Hebrew Language'; L. I. Levine, 'Art, Architecture, and Archaeology'; G. Hasan-Rokem, 'Jewish Folklore and Ethnography'; and H. E. Goldberg, 'Modern Jewish Society and Sociology'). This schema works fairly well, although some related topics (e.g. S. Friedländer, 'The Holocaust', and W. Benz, 'Anti-Semitism Research') do not appear together as a result. Most contributions provide the reader with a resumé of the history of scholarship in the subject area concerned, as well as a description of the current state of research and a more-or-less extensive bibliography. Thus, the book succeeds overall in 'providing a service to the neophyte and a stimulus to the initiate', as M. Fishbane has put it in relation to 'Bible Interpretation' (p. 682), in a way that makes it a unique teaching and research tool. As such, it will be of help to a wide range of advanced undergraduates, postgraduate students and scholars.

Nonetheless, while every chapter has something positive to offer, intermittently there are some disappointing features. On occasions, for instance, the discussion is so compressed that it is little more than a technical list of past and present scholarly views that non-initiates will find off-putting. More seriously, although mentioned at various points, more should have been made of Judaeo-Greek history, religion and literature in several chapters (e.g. S. Schwartz, 'Historiography on the Jews in the "Talmudic" Period: 70–640 CE', and I. Ta-Shma, 'Rabbinic Literature in the Middle Ages: 1000–1492'). At the other end of the chronological spectrum, fuller discussion of the specifically religious aspects of modern Judaism in its various denominational manifestations would have been welcome, either in a chapter on its own or else perhaps in P. Mendes-Flohr ('Jewish Philosophy and Theology'), or S. DellaPergola ('Demography'). Furthermore, here and there objections may be raised on historical or ideological grounds to the manner in which a given subject is described or discussed. For example, Second Temple literature is presented under the labels of 'Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha', 'Dead Sea Scrolls' and 'Diaspora Judaism', even though these arguably do not represent the best categories for grasping the historical significance of the full range of material available on its own terms (J. J. Collins, 'The Literature of the Second Temple Period'). Similarly, the odd description of Shi'ism as 'heterodox Islam' (in M. Polliack, 'Medieval Karaism') is likely to raise ideological eyebrows in academic Islamic Studies circles. No doubt other scholars will find similar gripes in relation to their own areas of expertise covered in this volume.

But these shortcomings pale into near insignificance compared to the great service done for us by the editors and contributors as a whole. Indeed, no scholar in the early twenty-first century should be that surprised to find a survey such as this shaped partly by the historical-cum-ideological interests of those involved in its production. And in any case, this fault—if fault it is—is counter-balanced by the inclusion of areas which some might be tempted to characterise unfairly as peripheral: Jewish music (P. V. Bohlman), theatre (A. Belkin and G. Kaynar) and film (M. Zimmerman), as well as Yiddish (C. E. Kuznitz), Judaeo-Spanish (O. R. Schwarzwald), Judaeo-Arabic (G. Khan), and other languages (I. Stavans). Moreover, the diverse chapters by M. Goodman ('Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period'), A. Cooper ('Biblical Studies and Jewish Studies'), J. Dan ('The Narratives of Medieval Jewish History'), R. Ben-Shalom ('Medieval Jewry in Christendom'), M. R. Cohen ('Medieval Jewry in the World of Islam'), T. Rosen and E. Yassif ('The Study of Hebrew Literature of the Middle Ages: Major Trends and Goals'), E. Carlebach ('European Jewry in the Early Modern Period: 1492–1750'), S. I. Troen ('Settlement and State in Eretz Israel'), H. Diner ('American Jewish History'), G. Abramson ('Modern Hebrew Literature'), B. Jackson *et al.* ('Halakhah and Law'), P. Alexander ('Mysticism'), L. A. Hoffman, ('Jewish Liturgy and Jewish Scholarship: Method and Cosmology') and T. Ilan ('Jewish Women's Studies') struck this reviewer as especially interesting and enlightening. Indeed, overlaps in subject matter and methodological interconnections between these assorted chapters, as well as between them and other areas of the humanities and social sciences, demonstrate the essentially interdisciplinary nature of modern Jewish Studies. Given the volume's remit to encourage reflection on the wider Jewish Studies context by individuals working within discrete areas of it, therefore, the book has certainly achieved its main objective.

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JOHN BARTON (ed.), *The Biblical World*. Routledge, London / New York, 2002. 2 vols. xxiii, 525 and viii, 539 pp. £130.00. ISBN 0-415-27573-3.

The Biblical World is an ambiguous title: it may refer either to the wider ancient world in which the Bible was set historically and from which it came, or to the 'inner world' of the Bible—a world evoked by powerful literature which may bear more, less or no relation to any real world which has ever existed or which now exists, but which becomes real to the reader (who need not necessarily be a believer) as he or she immerses himself or herself in its pages and returns to the real world as a person with changed horizons, outlooks and values.

The distinguished editor of this monumental work is not unaware of this ambiguity, and to some extent he has exploited it in the selection of topics for treatment by a galaxy of nearly fifty contributors, most of whom are household names in international scholarship. Many of the entries deal authoritatively with what might be regarded as background information—not necessarily the kind of information which every Bible reader needs, but which becomes of intense interest 'as soon as you stop to think about it' and which therefore is the frequent subject of questions when any with scholarly pretensions open themselves up to being questioned by what are patronisingly known as lay audiences. Why are these books in the Bible and not those, and anyway, where do the apocrypha fit in? Does archaeology prove the Bible or not? Why was there an Israel and a Judah? What exactly *are* the Dead Sea Scrolls? Who was Jesus, and why are there four gospels rather than just one? These and many other like questions are what this book sets out to answer in scholarly but accessible form.